

# Upskilling Your Organization at Speed and at Scale

## KOHLER CAPABILITY ACCELERATOR: A CASE STUDY



EXECUTIVE EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING

*Provided by the University of Virginia*

*Darden School Foundation*

# How Do You Upskill Your People at Scale (and at Speed)?

In June 2022, UVA Darden Executive Education & Lifelong Learning partnered with U.S. manufacturing giant Kohler Co. to design and deliver a unique learning program. The Kohler Capability Accelerator (KCA) was built and ready to launch in August of the same year.

KCA is a three-course, three-month learning journey. Each course maps to one of three business-critical functions and integrates its own set of learning objectives and outcomes:

- Kohler Performance Marketing: Leveraging Data, Testing and Growth Tactics
- Kohler Power Systems: Data for Price Optimization and Sales Analytics
- Kohler Supply Chain: Analytics and Optimization Frameworks

Participants work through their individual course within a set time allowance: their learning accelerated by face-time with top Darden faculty, next-generation learning resources and methodologies, one-on-one coaching, and assessment techniques that drive momentum while plotting progress. Laser-focused on Kohler's specific capability needs and fully leveraging Darden's world-class thought leadership, Darden content and deep experience in education for executives, KCA was conceived, designed, built and launched in just two months.

## Here's how we did it.

### THE CHALLENGE: UPSKILLING THREE COHORTS ACROSS THREE BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

Founded in 1873, Kohler Co. is one of the oldest and largest privately held companies in the U.S. With manufacturing plants all over the globe, Kohler is a long-established leader in each of its major business groups: Kitchen and Bath, Energy, and Hospitality and Real Estate. In 2022, the company leadership realized it had a need. To stay ahead of the market and in the face of intensifying competition for talent, Kohler would have to upgrade workforce capabilities across three strategic functions: **marketing, data analytics and supply chain management**. This need dovetailed with a pre-existing and long-term goal that the company had set: to build an in-house Kohler capability accelerator — a repeatable and scalable training solution for its employees that could link to specific and evolving business objectives and outcomes.

Kohler leadership and L&D did a thorough job laying the groundwork for what this learning solution needed to look like.

To be effective, it needed to:

- Address the strategic capability building that would drive priority business outcomes.
- Resolve the conflict between training and day-to-day work responsibilities such that participants could see the value and the direct applicability of the learning.
- Be scalable and sustainable: the solution would need to reach a significant number of participants and it would need to be repeatable across future cohorts as needs evolved. In short, this meant that learning would need to be digital.

Kohler understood its own needs well. It also understood that extensive expertise in pedagogy and training program design would be required to build a capability accelerator. Kohler needed a learning partner.

*“As we started looking at partners, we were looking at which universities are actually leading the charge in education in this format [scalable online learning]. Which universities are driving the most cutting-edge research in the fields of business. And which universities carry a brand name that everyone wants to be associated with. As we had our initial conversations with the University of Virginia Darden School of Business, we quickly came to the conclusion that not only did we have all of these in place, we had a team that we could partner with who was willing to experiment and learn with us, and build a program together.”*

Nithin Ramachandran, VP Information Technology | Transformation, Program Management, Data and AI/ML, Kohler Co.

# Getting to Work: A Collaborative, Customized Approach

Kohler and UVA Darden Executive Education & Lifelong Learning partnered to create the Kohler Capability Accelerator in June 2022, with one important caveat: not only would the program they designed have to meet Kohler's learning outcomes, it would need to be ready to launch **inside two months**.

To meet this challenge, Darden program design experts worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Kohler leadership and L&D leads to do these four critical things:

- Analyze, refine and articulate Kohler's learning objectives across all three courses: performance marketing, power systems for sales and pricing, and supply chain optimization.
- Map these learning objectives to existing Darden content from existing Darden executive education programs and Darden faculty experts.
- Design an easy-access digital platform that could house asynchronous content while enabling live virtual and interactive functionality between learners, faculty and coaches.
- Integrate touchpoints to capture Kohler feedback in order to iterate and improve or customize content on the go.

*“The Kohler team did a great job putting together a strategy for their learning needs upfront. And because we knew what they wanted, we were able to go to the specific content that we had within our rich bank of assets and make the right matches. It was a win-win. Kohler got curriculum they needed, within the short timeframe they wanted.”*

Lisa Cannell, Managing Director, Executive Education & Lifelong Learning, UVA Darden

## The Solution: The Kohler Capacity Accelerator



### Objectives

- Invest in, upskill and retain core talent to sustain competitive edge
- Accelerate capabilities in three core Kohler business functions: marketing, data analytics for sales & pricing, and supply chain management
- Deliver scalable and repeatable training for current and future cohorts to ensure long-term, sustainable impact



### Solution: Three-course, Online & Virtual Learning Journey

- Three self-paced online and virtual interactive courses for 3 sets of functional managers with built-in progress trackers
- Eight modules with faculty videos, quizzes, discussion boards & integrated survey touchpoints
- Scheduled one-to-one and office-hours coaching
- Project-based Capstone assignment addressing real-world business challenge



### Results and Future Outcomes:

- Participants engaged and motivated
- Direct application of learning on actual, real-world business challenges and projects
- A more empowered workforce leading strategic functional areas with enhanced strategic thinking and data analytics skills
- Enhanced capabilities at an organizational level to drive long-term performance and results

# Getting to Work: A Collaborative, Customized Approach

## Iteration on the fly

KCA is built on Darden's NovoEd digital platform: a leading-edge learning space with the flexibility to add, remove and customize design elements. About halfway through KCA's inaugural launch, Kohler wanted the option of soliciting feedback from participants. Darden worked with them to seamlessly integrate additional virtual, live sessions with faculty, which were attended at full capacity by Kohler learners. Participant feedback is also captured via discussion boards, where participants are challenged to reflect on new concepts and approaches and share ideas. Nearly 100% of Kohler learners actively participate in these boards. Capturing live feedback is a way to better serve learners, enabling the team to measure impact and adapt, improve and add new elements to the training as needs emerge or evolve.

*“An online program should be alive. It should be a dynamic, active event and not something passive. With Kohler, we had weekly calls and meetings and we used technology to create dynamic feedback loops and to review the data, making adjustments to the program on the fly. This way you are really able make it work for your learners.”*

Anne Trumbore, Chief Digital Learning Officer, Sands Institute for Lifelong Learning, UVA Darden

## Metrics that Matter

Full completion of KCA is a clearly-articulated participant requirement, and the Darden team was able to integrate trackers at different touchpoints within all three program courses, both to motivate learners and keep their managers up to speed on progress. For Kohler, an even more critical metric though, was participants' ability to deploy new skills in actual business challenges. Again, the Darden team worked with Kohler L&D leads to create an effective assessment mechanism: a final Capstone assignment project where participants work with their manager to identify a real-world need or problem and devise a solution that leverages their new knowledge. New ideas, concepts, approaches and skills are put into action in a way that makes the learning more relevant to participants, while creating immediate and tangible value for the company.

*“KCA offers a rich learning experience, access to Darden faculty and their research, and the affirmation that your company wants to invest in you and your development – but with all of that, you also get something really concrete, and that is direct applicability on real challenges. And for Kohler and its participants that constitutes a really big pay-off and return on investment.”*

Lisa Cannell, Managing Director, Executive Education & Lifelong Learning, UVA Darden

*“Our course team worked closely with Kohler to ensure participants were not only progressing, but achieving their goals and objectives in the program. And we worked with Kohler to add several opportunities that allowed participants to articulate and describe what they needed, and what would help them achieve their learning objectives. This really helped with creating a more personalized learning experience.”*

Wesley Best, Director of Educational Technologies and Digital Programs, UVA Darden.



# Impact

KCA is a program that fully leverages digital technology to accelerate and scale capability building at the organizational level. Darden and Kohler have created a rich, robust learning experience that opens up access to knowledge and skills for a cohort of decision-makers across three critical functions, at speed and at scale — and in a manner that is cost-effective and minimally disruptive for the organization.

What's more, KCA is set to deliver training to future cohorts and has the flexibility to offer increased customization as Kohler's needs and objectives evolve or change.

KCA fully leverages Darden Executive Education & Lifelong Learning expertise in designing and delivering globally scalable and sustainable learning solutions.

In its inaugural year, the program saw just under 100 Kohler participants benefitting from:

- Highly customized content expertly geared to upgrading their technical skills and knowledge
- Direct facetime with globally recognized Darden professors
- Individual coaching and technical tutoring from expert coaches
- A chance to drive performance and impact by applying new capabilities to real-world business problems

On completing their KCA journey, Kohler participants are also awarded a Kohler-Darden certificate and are invited to the University of Virginia Grounds to take part in a graduation ceremony: an act that recognizes their achievement and underscores their importance to the organization as valued employees and decision makers.

Get a glimpse of the Darden experience and hear what Kohler leadership and participants found most impactful about the Kohler Capability Accelerator.



*“KCA is a great example of partnership. At UVA Darden we have the in-house expertise that can be customized fast and effectively to meet needs. Meanwhile Kohler has fully grasped the importance of investing in their talent and incentivizing learning. They have understood that achievement needs to be contextualized as a path to recognition and advancement. Bringing their KCA graduates to campus for a graduation ceremony gives these talented people a chance to meet faculty in person, to interact with their senior leadership team – and to feel seen and celebrated.”*

Anne Trumbore, Chief Digital Learning Officer, Sands Institute for Lifelong Learning, UVA Darden



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